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**City/suburbs**

# EPA deadline nears for Alsip dump cleanup plan

By Laurie Goering

Owners of an abandoned Alsip waste dump that is leaking hazardous chemicals must have a cleanup plan ready by Thursday or face steep fines and the bill for a federal cleanup, U.S. EPA officials said Tuesday.

Levels of PCBs, benzene and various flammable chemicals are high enough at the Chicago Industrial Waste Haulers dump, 4206 W. Shirley Lane, Alsip, to warrant the use of breathing devices and protective clothing by anyone at the site, said an Environmental Protection Agency spokesman.

Despite that, since March "we've

seen [Chicago Industrial] workers there shoveling materials out of the tanks, shoveling pink sludge, and they had no protective gear on at all," said Richard Rupert, on-scene coordinator for the federal agency. "They said they didn't know what it was."

Officials say the leakage is confined to the site and that a nearby creek, as well as homes and a playground 400 feet to the north, are not in immediate danger. Nevertheless, Alsip firefighters have been instructed to evacuate the homes if a fire breaks out at the site.

The site was once used as a waste-transfer station for used oil and hazardous waste, Rupert said.

Problems first came to light in 1984 when two children playing on the site with matches were injured when fumes ignited, said Dan O'Riordan, a U.S. EPA spokesman in Chicago.

A state EPA inspection found more than 15 violations of environmental protection and pollution regulations, including PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) improperly stored on the site, located in an industrial block in Alsip.

In 1986, the company's permit to haul hazardous wastes was not renewed, and the company moved to East Chicago, leaving the Alsip site abandoned with several large tanks full of what was believed to

be used oil, Rupert said.

After the closure, the state EPA pushed the company to "clean close" the site, or remove the oil and chemicals to make the property safe to sell. However, "the state was pretty much unsuccessful," Rupert said, so the matter was referred to the federal EPA in late 1987.

This March, during a routine spill-prevention check, workers "found a little more there than just oil" in the tanks, Rupert said, including PCBs "not stored in any type of safe storage."

On Thursday the federal agency ruled the site presents "imminent substantial endangerment to the

environment," and ordered Chicago Industrial to present a cleanup plan by Thursday or face fines of up to \$25,000 a day.

"Under the law, they have the opportunity to clean it up within a set time," Rupert said. "Otherwise we will use Superfund money [for the cleanup], then sue them for three times the cost. That's the incentive for them."

"This is one of the programs that really can get something done," he said.

However, a federal cleanup probably will not be necessary, Rupert said, since the attorney for Chicago Industrial, Fred Prillaman, has indicated the company intends to

present a plan by the deadline.

The company also is complying with EPA demands to provide security at the site, begin sampling of the tanks and build a security dam around the tanks in case of leakage, Rupert said.

"They seem interested in working this out," he said.

So far, Rupert said, leakage from the site has not entered Stony Creek, about 100 feet away. The EPA had been concerned that chemicals would contaminate the creek, which drains into Lake Michigan. However, more extensive testing of the waterway is planned, Rupert said.